

Cuban Economic Troubles Called a Brake on Castro

3/14/64

The following article is by a correspondent of The New York Times who recently returned after two months in Cuba.

By JUAN de ONIS

The weakest point in Premier Fidel Castro's revolutionary Socialist regime is the economy, or what Cuba's Communists call "the material base of the new society."

The task of trying to increase the production of Cuba's confused agriculture and uncertain industry is so taxing for the bearded revolutionaries that it has damped their early missionary zeal to "export the revolution."

"Revolution = Production" painted across factory walls, is the sober slogan of the hour. There are many indications that the Cuban regime is now eager to keep the peace in the Caribbean, leave its Latin-American neighbors alone and try to "construct socialism" at home.

Brazil's Revolt a Blow

Dr. Castro nurses the idea that somehow a formal understanding can be reached with the United States on bilateral and regional problems, an understanding that would strengthen Cuba domestically.

However, he recognizes that the moment is not favorable in United States politics. The most that many Cuban revolutionaries hope for is reflected in a phrase often directed without hostility at a visitor from the United States: "Just leave us alone."

The anti-Communist military revolt in Brazil dashed Cuban hopes that a sympathetic "popular front" regime would take hold in Latin America's largest country, thereby providing Cuba with greater support in the Western Hemisphere. Minor guerrilla groups, apparently organized with Cuban support

Continued on Page 15, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

have bungled attempts in recent years to open revolutionary fronts in half a dozen Latin-American countries.

Since the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962, when the Soviet Union pulled strategic rockets out of the island, the Cubans have known that the military support they receive from Russia is subject to decisions beyond their control, based on United States-Soviet relations.

Soviet soldiers in blue fatigues, who are said to be in Cuba manning anti-aircraft rockets and modern tanks and teaching Cubans to use them, are seen riding around Havana in trucks, apparently on outings.

Soviet Soldiers Departing

It is believed that these forces are being reduced from month to month, while the number of Soviet and Eastern-bloc-agricultural, industrial and mining engineers and technicians is increasing.

The United States commercial and financial blockade damages the Cuban economy severely, despite the recent success of the Cubans in increasing purchases of foods, chemicals, breeding cattle, spare parts and transport equipment in Canada, Japan and Europe.

There is visible evidence of the blockade in the junkyard aspect of Havana, which is strewn with abandoned automobiles stripped of tires and parts. Factories using United States machines are frequently paralyzed for lack of spare parts.

Cuba on the Defensive

For all these reasons Cuba, despite her armed revolutionary posture, is on the defensive—a small, island nation 90 miles from a far more powerful, unfriendly neighbor; separated by half the globe from its major market and source of bread, petroleum and arms; and confronted with unusually complex

problems of economic development.

Dr. Castro, his economic planners, and the Government's propaganda and public education systems incessantly repeat the promise that "Socialism means abundance" if it is properly applied in Cuba.

Soviet Achievements Cheered

As if to buttress the argument, the press and radio describe frequently the industrial achievements and technological "firsts" of the Soviet Union, as well as the great plans announced by the Soviet Communist party's Central Committee for Russian agriculture.

But in their daily experience the Cuban people encounter a distinct gap between the promise of state Socialism and economic performance in this fertile island.

More than five years after the triumph of Dr. Castro's revolution, large farms, factories, stores, banks and transport are all firmly under state control, but the Cuban economy is not clicking. Production still falls short of the regime's already limited goals for feeding and clothing Cuba's seven million people.

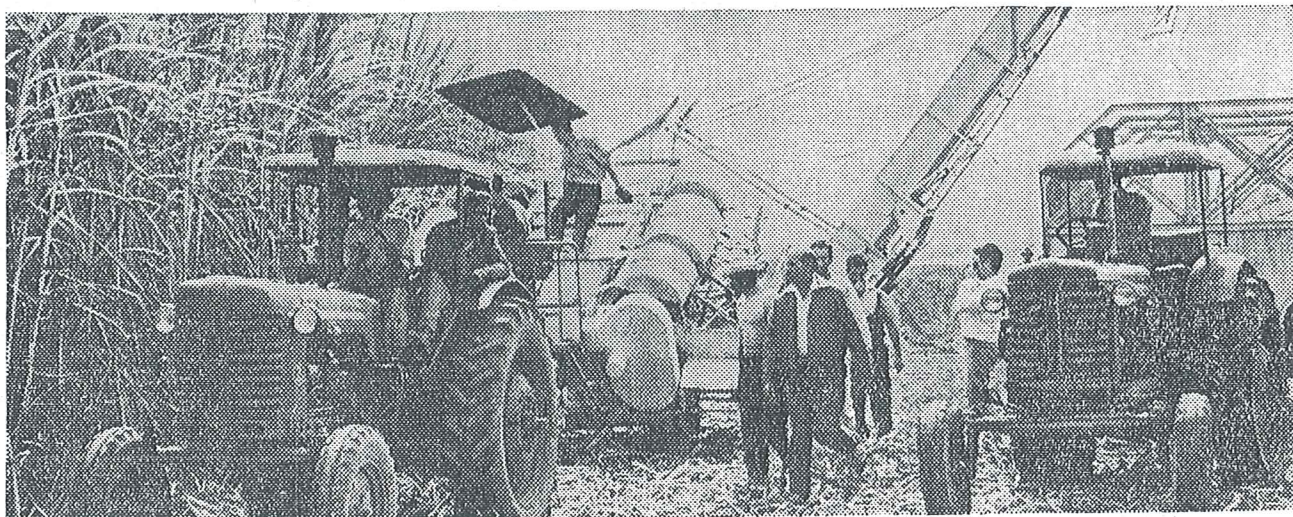
Discontent Short of Despair

This does not mean people are suffering severe hunger or going barefoot in Cuba, nor that the discontent of workers and housewives over scarcities has reached despair. But the day-to-day vexations of obtaining food rations, shoes and clothing, transport and personal services are the main source of dissatisfaction with the revolution.

The black market operates in some goods that are rationed, such as rice and eggs, and in others that can be obtained only with official purchase authorizations such as cement and automotive spare parts.

Eggs, which are rationed at four a month for each person, sell on the black market for 40 centavos apiece, or the equivalent of nearly \$5 a dozen. A pound of rice, which is sold for 20 centavos on the ration card, brings up to \$1.50 in Havana and \$2 in interior towns. Rice and beans are Cuba's basic foods.

Illegal food sales are quite common, and in a society committed to equality of distribution of essential goods and services there are evident inequalities in consumption be-



The New York Times (by Juan de Onils)

CUBAN ECONOMIC PROBLEM: The sugar harvest, which is at heart of Cuba's economic potential. Although Cuba is still world's largest producer of sugar, last

year's production was only 60 per cent of 1952-58 average. Here, a Soviet-made harvesting machine cuts cane. Premier Castro's goal is the full mechanization of the industry.

tween have-more and have-less people.

There are cases in which the mother of a large, low-income family sells her quota of one cake of soap a month per person to a wealthier middle-class family and uses the money to buy rice.

Large black-market operations include automobile tires—four tires may bring as much as \$1,000—cement and spare parts. In recent weeks two persons have been convicted to eight-year prison terms for stealing automobile spare parts from a state enterprise and selling them, and a ring that peddled cement was discovered.

Security Apparatus Works

The Cuban regime has mounted a military and internal security apparatus that is expensive but quietly effective. Counter-revolutionaries caught in subversive activities or serious sabotage are executed.

Prisons and panel farms hold men and women convicted by revolutionary courts of lesser crimes against state security and the economy, such as embezzlement, breakage of machinery, factory thefts and black marketeering.

Dr. Castro's personal style is not that of the police state. He has the political instincts of a popular leader and he strives, with great personal magnetism, to maintain the broadest possible grass-roots support for the revolutionary program.

He has little to offer his people except sacrifice and work, and the opportunity for the young to study.

"If we are not able to ob-

tain abundance here it will be simply because we are complete incompetents to do so, or because we don't want it," Dr. Castro said recently to the Cuban people in a ceremony honoring the National Heroes of Labor selected this year as an example to their fellow workers. Rewards for Heroes of Labor include trips to the Soviet Union.

Soviet Techniques Followed

Cuba's labor policies, including such devices as the Hero of Socialist Labor, are strongly reminiscent of the methods developed in the Soviet Union in the nineteen-thirties. They are symbolized by a huge sign in tremulous red and green neon letters on the facade of the Ministry of Labor building that says: "Emulating We Will Win."

Emulation, or socialist competition, is a system whereby the workers, and their production units, are induced to increase and speed up their output by an apparently childish game. It works this way:

At the Gilbert dam project near Santiago de Cuba 200 construction workers operate bulldozers, draglines, air hammers and heavy trucks, among other equipment.

One day, the administrator of the project, the delegate of the construction workers' union and the local representative of Cuba's Unified Revolutionary Socialist party announce that there will be "an emulation" to see which truck can move the most earth or which driller can bore the most holes in an

hour.

This challenges the pride and competitive spirit of the workers and they toil with unusual effort. There are checkers who keep records. A few days later, the workers are called to a production meeting.

It is announced that "norms" have been set for minimum standards of production in each job and the workers are asked to endorse them. The "norms" are the best work done in each category on the day of the "emulation."

In one production meeting at the Gilbert dam, a "confused comrade" got up and said that the system of "emulation" and "norms" was "exploitation" of

the workers. He was taken in hand by the party representative and union delegate. At the next meeting he said he had recognized his "error" and that he had failed to see the "collective benefits" of the new system.

Clumsy Workers Punished

An engineer on the project said that workers who fall far below production norms or break their tools can be reduced in wage classification, "put to work in the quarry, or sent away to a state farm." He said that at Gilbert they had not sent anyone away.

As for results, he said the Gilbert emulation had raised the minimum pace of drillers from 15 feet an hour of bored holes to 25 feet an hour. Truck

loads moved per hour had been doubled, he said. There is a section of clerical workers on the project that does nothing but check and report on production workers.

The union delegate, chosen by the workers, seems to report on grievances of workers whose boots or overalls wear out without replacement, or raise complaints about the quality of the food served at the job mess.

As far as "emulation," work norms and wage classification, the union delegate acts in concert with the project administrator and party delegate.

Roles of Unions Defined

Minister of Education Armand Hart explained the difference between the role of a Communist-led union in a capitalist country and in a "country that is constructing socialism." In the former, the "revolutionary character" of the union is measured by its contributing to undermining the regime and making possible the "seizure of power."

In Cuba, he said, a union's "revolutionary character is provided by its contribution to the concrete work of building the new society."

As a means of furthering such "concrete work," the regime encourages workers to make contributions of "voluntary hours" of extra labor, without pay, in their factories or harvesting crops on weekends.

Such contributions, in addition to attendance at "worker improvement" classes in reading and arithmetic and at Marxist-Leninist indoctrination courses after work hours, help a worker improve his wage classification.

Cane Cutter Chief Hero

The concept of production targets, and the example of the Heroes of Labor, are constant themes of Government propaganda. The chief Hero of Labor is Reinaldo Castro, a 36-year-old sugar-cane cutter who chops the extraordinary total of 10 tons of cane in a working day.

The effectiveness of these methods is open to question. At a state sugar-cane farm in Oriente province, not one among fifteen members of a cane-cutting brigade could identify their "model worker," Mr. Castro, by name a week after ev-

ery newspaper in Cuba carried his photograph and name in headlines, and all denied that any man could cut 10 tons of cane in a day.

At the construction site of a major power plant, which is a showcase of the regime, a welder flipped up his mask and said scornfully, in the presence of the personnel director and a visitor whom he took for a newspaperman: "Every day a new victory for socialism, as it says in the paper."

Sugar Problem is Greatest

The biggest economic problem facing Cuba, each year is the sugar harvest. Cuba is still the world's largest sugar producer, with an output of 3.8 million metric tons last year and a similar total expected this year. But this volume is only 60 per cent of the 1952-58 average in the prerevolution period.

The Castro regime has announced the most ambitious sugar production plan ever set forth in Cuba. In an agreement with the Soviet Union, Cuba is supposed to produce 10 million tons by 1970. The highest production ever obtained was 7.2 million in 1952.

Dr. Castro has announced that Cuba will reach the target by fully mechanizing cane gathering with Soviet self-propelled harvesters now being tested in Cuba. But for the time being the grinding potential of the 152 Cuba seems unable to mobilize the manpower, food, trucks, fuels and lubricants in the cane area to cut enough cane to fill state mills.

All the explanations for this inability come back to manpower. Some persons say that too many young men are in the armed forces, although 20,000 soldiers have been assigned to cane-cutting brigades.

What seems more likely is that the state farm workers don't want to make the extra effort of cutting cane for low wages, or when the regular food ration of $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds of meat a week is in practice only $\frac{1}{4}$ pound in the cane region of eastern Cuba.